

# The last word the politics of editing, part three—internal education

by the editors

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Fundamental to JUMP CUT's process and growth as a political project is internal education. By this we mean that the staff, as a group, engages in study and discussion of selected readings. In this series of editorials on how we function, we would like to describe our goals and methods of internal education and also, in the Resources section, to share with you some of the reading lists we've developed over the last few years.

Internal education can provide both information and a method of analysis that the established educational system and the media systematically ignore. For example, any of us would have to make an effort to find out about the history of U.S. labor, the economics of racism, the contending theories in the women's movement, or the politics of various African liberation organizations. Yet a knowledge of each and any of these areas would significantly increase our understanding of society as a whole. In short, we have to continue our education no matter how much formal schooling we have had. In addition to gaining factual knowledge, people need to learn the kind of analysis and question-asking that is usually left out of their education.

Questions that come up over and over again in our internal education sessions include the following: What is the relation of the economic system to social life and to culture? How can we understand both the personal and the political dimensions of something in our own lives? How can things be changed? How can people change? Antiquated and oppressive structures inherent in the dominant ideology serve to keep most of us from examining precisely what that ideology encourages us to take for granted, from making connections, and from overcoming fragmentation. We need to develop new ways of thinking - what Marxists call thinking dialectically, materialistically, and historically - so

as to be able to use new information to promote change.

Doing study within a group provides a formal mechanism and opportunity for these with more information and experience to share knowledge with less experienced members. The "oldtimers" refine their own understanding through that sharing. And, since knowledge is power, internal education also significantly serves to help all group members participate as equals in discussion, decision making, and other activity.

An example of this process can be seen in the steps we went through to write the editorial on gay liberation in JUMP CUT 16. Some of the staff felt that this editorial, written to accompany the Gay Special Section, should be signed by the entire staff. To do this, we wrote several drafts, had them read and critiqued by the Berkeley and Chicago work groups, and had the entire editorial board send in suggestions and questions. While the editorial was initiated by staff members more familiar with the politics of gay liberation, the entire staff grew in the process of working through various and sometimes conflicting positions within the gay movement.

Internal education also helps everyone in a group understand the basic political unity the group shares. When new situations arise, the staff does not have to address these as unrelated events or problems, but rather can understand the new configuration in terms of previously shared knowledge. One of JUMP CUT's principles of unity has always been a deep commitment to feminism. Furthermore, throughout the years feminist writings have been an important part of our internal education. We believe that both men and women need to engage actively in understanding feminist thought in ever more profound ways. Our discussions of feminism have helped us all arrive at a principled and informed position from which to insist that JUMP CUT writers deal with issues of sexism in the films they discuss. Analysis of issues in feminist film criticism, especially as raised by our women writers, has helped us clarify both the methodology and principles involved in discussing sexual politics in film, which insights in turn we try to pass on to other writers as we critique their manuscripts.

Internal education can also help to build unity. Talking about ideas in terms of someone else's writing lets us explore our political differences in a fairly neutral and nonthreatening way. Such discussion does not have to end in making some decision and acting upon it - as happens constantly with regard to manuscripts - so people can proceed in a more open-ended way. For example, reading about and discussing the history of the New Left and the rise of the contemporary women's movement let group members both tell how their political involvement began and let each see the others' involvement in on historical context. The reading in this case both clarifies our understanding of where the others are

coming from and removes the competitive tone of "who has more political experience" that such discussions often engender, a tone especially resented by women in a mixed group.

When two co-editors began working together on JUMP CUT in January 1974, they didn't know each other very well and hadn't had the opportunity to work together. They came to the project with different political backgrounds. Chuck had lived through the intense experience of the New Left in the late sixties and early seventies; John had not, having just recently become involved in radical politics and interested in Marxist thought. Living in separate parts of the country, they could only communicate by letters, tapes, and occasional phone calls. Working out JUMP CUT's policies and politics was rough going as political differences often became confused with personal ones. By initiating a process of internal education to deal with the situation, the co-editors externalized the conflict to a certain degree, separated out personal and political differences, and dealt with the differences in appropriate ways. The results of this struggle were a greater unity and political growth, a stronger commitment to the project and to each other, and a deeper understanding of their work as editors.

The Berkeley and Chicago work groups have similarly, and sometimes awkwardly, used internal education as a tool for growth. In fall 1976, the newly formed Berkeley work group began by reading past JUMP CUT editorials, which we later realized was a big mistake. Since one of the authors, John Hess, was present, the editorials could not be discussed dispassionately and were actually intimidating in a way that an external document would not have been, for they set up the editors as authorities. (How we try to discover and deal with such problems in group dynamics will be discussed in the next editorial in this series.) On the other hand, that group's study of feminist writings led to an intense but constructive discussion of the group's sexism. Both the specific content of the readings and the fact that the people were dealing with feminist concerns in an open way encouraged the women in the group to criticize the men's sexism and raise further criticism in later meetings. In turn, the men had to deal with feminist issues in both an abstract way, as raised by the readings, and in a concrete way, as raised by personal criticisms within the group.

In addition to formal types of internal education, a project like JUMP CUT has many informal types of education. For example, we read and discuss manuscripts in a group. The entire staff, not just those in work groups, receives drafts of editorials and memos on significant policy matters for discussion and criticism. JUMP CUT also provides on the job training in publication work, with the staff advancing in practical skills such as correspondence with writers, layout, and office work.

Internal education raises both the individual's and the group's practice

to a higher level of understanding, consciousness, and effectiveness - and actual practice provides the best test of lessons learned through study. We think that this process is a key component of group political work that has helped JUMP CUT grow and remain open to change.

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